

Testimony of

Karen Evans

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Before the

Education Committee

March 15, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I testify today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut, showing educators that theirs is a respected profession, and ensuring that our classrooms and schools can provide the best possible education for our students.

I have been an elementary school teacher for over twenty-eight years, and I strongly support all of the items that this bill represents. Teaching during COVID was THE most stressful time in my career. It affected me emotionally and physically. I was asked to go above and beyond in such a short amount of time. I worked in a district in which school closed on a Friday and we were giving a laptop and told to be ready to teach from home virtually on Monday. We had no prior experience or guidance on how to do this. We had to figure it out. This pressure - among the stress of the unknowns of what COVID was, how it was spread, stores being closed, not allowed to see people, having other family members also working in my home – was overwhelming at times and had negative effects on my health. I didn't let my students or their families down. On Monday, I was there for them and every day of the week for the remainder of the school year. We were synchronous, as well as asynchronous. I worked hard every day to create lessons that I could do live and ones that I could video and upload for my students to watch. I became knowledgeable with a new platform for me, Google Classroom. All my students had to be taught it as well. It was a relief when summer came as I finally had the chance to catch my breath. In the fall of 2020, we returned to school where the stress continued. For the first few months, half of our students came in person, all of us masked, then behind desk shields, while the other half was at home. We learned what dual teaching was and I traveled from my class to the class next door to teach my two subjects rather than having the students move classrooms. Again, I had to figure out a different way to teach to reach all my students. The next day, the students at home came into school and I dual taught again. It was exhausting. And, knowing

that parents at home were also watching me teach was an added layer of stress. Quite honestly, I have tried to put all of this out of my memory as it was the worst time of my teaching career. But I did it for my students and for their families, and as an essential worker, I too deserve to be compensated for what I did. The COVID Benefit Enhancement is a way to do this. While every piece of this bill is important, a duty-free prep time, with a minimum of thirty minutes uninterrupted, should be a right for all educators. Prep time infers that we are preparing for our lessons. In addition to this time, teachers read and respond to emails and correct work. Typically, these professional responsibilities take a minimum of an hour to two hours to complete each day, if not more. The rest of our day consists of teaching our students and attending meetings. We are paid less than professionals with equal schooling, and we work beyond the hours we are paid – evenings and weekends. And I am a veteran teacher. Add on many more hours for teachers just starting out. Connecticut wants to attract and keep teachers? Treat them as professionals. Guaranteeing duty free prep time is one way to do this. Establishing minimum teacher salary is another. Please listen to our voices and support what we do and treat us as the professionals we are. Now is the time you can make a difference for us and for our students. Please pass House Bill 6884. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen Evans Ivoryton, CT

